

AED/LearnLink

ICT Applications for Development

AED/LearnLink uses information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support development. Activities range from public access telecenters to teacher training, professional development, organizational networking, e-commerce, e-government, and institutional capacity building. Lessons from field experiences are shared to contribute to the body of knowledge on using ICTs for development.



Keyword Identifiers: professional development, distance education, computer mediated training, NGO, social work, and child welfare

Purpose: To support Romania's efforts to reform the child welfare system by improving online networking and professional development opportunities for social workers; to assess the effectiveness of computer-mediated participant training

Description: This pilot activity assists the Romanian Resource and Information Center for the Social Professions (CRIPS), a women owned and run NGO, to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) and distance education approaches to create a virtual learning community for social workers. With AED/LearnLink's assistance, in collaboration with partners World Learning and Teleologic, several new computer-mediated tools have been created to contribute to the professional development

repertoire. A newly designed course, The Foundations of Social Work, is available through CRIPS' new web site (<http://www.copii.ro>) or, in non-Internet accessible locations, through a CD-ROM distributed by the organization. CRIPS also has created and is managing a listserv for social workers that enables them to talk with each other and share information and ideas. Current and comprehensive reference materials, formerly available only at the CRIPS' office, are being digitized and can be



CRIPS staff launching the online Foundations of Social Work course

accessed by social workers throughout the country. Additional online courses helped train CRIPS' staff in how to create and moderate a listserv and in online instruction methods. Finally, an impact analysis may help guide USAID Participant Training Programs and the application of ICTs in USAID programs worldwide.



A CRIPS social worker accessing the computer mediated online Foundations course



LearnLink staff member meeting with CRIPS staff

social workers, but also to help them use technology tools to link up with counterparts-and to access information-around the world.

Finally, evaluation data is expected to answer at least two key questions for USAID and other donors: By using computer mediation to bolster face-to-face training, can a greater number of participants be trained at a lower marginal cost and without compromising learning outcomes? And to what degree does professional networking actually occur once the electronic communication tools are in place?

Challenges: The major challenges the activity faced included (a) expanding training opportunities to reach more social workers, (b) maintaining professional networking after face-to-face training took place, and (c) standardizing, digitizing, and disseminating electronic resources for social workers.



Core CRIPS staff at a meeting

Lessons Learned: The activity has demonstrated that motivated professionals can quickly acquire and apply ICT skills. To date, the activity also has indicated that computer mediation can effectively supplement face-to-face training.

Unique Applications: Starting with near to zero ICT experience, the CRIPS staff have demonstrated considerable skill and competence in creating and maintaining an effective online learning environment. The activity has launched a virtual community of social workers in Romania.



Bucharest, Romania where CRIPS offices and resources are located

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